

COMMITTEE ON GOVERNMENT REFORM

TOM DAVIS, CHAIRMAN



NEWS RELEASE

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Government Reform Will Investigate Katrina Response

WASHINGTON, D.C. – House Government Reform Committee Chairman Tom Davis (R-VA) announced today the committee will begin holding hearings beginning next week on issues and questions related to Hurricane Katrina.

Davis released the following statement on likely hearing topics:

“My staff and I have spent much of the past week examining the aftermath of this tragic natural disaster. It has become increasingly clear that local, state, and federal government agencies failed to fully meet the needs of the residents of Louisiana and Mississippi. Now it’s our job to figure out why, and to make sure we are better prepared for the future.

“Today I received a letter from the Committee’s Ranking Member, Henry Waxman (D-CA), asking for hearings into the preparation for and response to the hurricane. I look forward to working with him on this critically important undertaking, and thank him for sharing our interest. Mr. Waxman raised many important questions that need to be addressed: whether FEMA has been organizationally undermined and under-funded; whether evacuation plans were adequate; whether opportunities to better safeguard the New Orleans levee system were missed; why relief and medical supplies and support were seemingly slow in arriving; and several others.

“However, I believe the letter overlooks many other questions that need to be asked, and prematurely faults the federal government for all governmental shortcomings; in fact, local and state government failures are not mentioned at all in the letter. For example, Mr. Waxman’s letter wonders why ‘there were no federal plans for evacuating residents without access to vehicles’ and why ‘the Department of Homeland Security fail[ed] to ensure basic communications capacity’ for first responders. We need to figure out why evacuation plans and emergency communications systems were woefully deficient; we don’t need to prematurely paint the picture that these are solely, or even primarily, federal government responsibilities.

“This is not the time to attack or defend government entities for political purposes. Rather, this is a time to do the oversight we’re charged with doing. Our Committee will aggressively investigate what went wrong and what went right. We’ll do it by the book, and let the chips fall where they may.

“There is much to examine here. We need to ask why coordination and information sharing between local, state, and federal governments appears to have been so dismal. We need to look at who should be vested with ultimate ‘emergency power,’ asking what should happen if and when state leaders decline federal assistance with lives at stake. We need to make sure mechanisms are in place to prevent people from capitalizing on catastrophe, whether it be price gouging at the pump or stealing money from the best among us through bogus charities. We need to review again how effectively DHS grants are being spent in urban areas around the country. We need to compare and contrast preparedness plans in other cities and states. We need to ask whether our public infrastructure is prepared for Katrina’s aftermath. And we need to discuss potential legislative fixes that can aid not only the victims of Katrina, but those who will face future natural disasters as well.

“We also need to review our national preparedness exercises, which are designed to result in action plans and protocol that can be enacted at a moment's notice in response to various emergencies. These exercises are the very vehicles to ensure information sharing and coordination among federal, state and local entities in the event of a disaster.

“Finally, we will need to conduct our oversight in a manner that does not interfere with the life-and-death work being done. Government officials and others can answer our questions when they’re done rescuing men, women, and children and performing the countless other tasks they need to perform. Until then, we’ll begin reviewing those issues that won’t pull responders away from the people and places that need them most.”

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